# Culture & the creative economy in the central South

## Feedback from sector seminars

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### Introduction

Since the Partnership for South Hampshire was established it has taken a proactive role in supporting culture and creativity across the region. After 16 years of supporting the sector through the Quality Places Delivery Panel and Creative Network South (CNS - a creative industries partnership led by Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and established jointly with PfSH), and with some personnel changes imminent, PfSH decided the time was ripe to review how the sector could be encouraged to thrive and contribute to wider objectives.

The Southern Policy Centre (SPC) was commissioned by PfSH and CNS to lead a review and advise on how that support could best be provided in future. This report briefly summarises the conclusions of two seminars held with a broad range of organisations and practitioners and makes some initial recommendations.

### Our Approach

SPC held two seminars on June 10th in Southampton and on July 15th in Portsmouth. They brought together representatives of more than thirty different organisations who are part of the culture and creative sector or have an interest in what it can offer, along with a number of creative practitioners and businesses. Speakers included the Arts Council, University of Portsmouth, Southampton's City of Culture Team, Isle of Wight Council, community and public health practitioners, Tech South and Hampshire Chamber of Commerce. We also heard from the Chair of Creative Estuary, a partnership supported by the South East LEP.

Invitations were sent to organisations outside the PfSH area, including Rushmoor BC and Isle of Wight Council, who are Arts Council 'priority areas', and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, as well as creative practitioners across Hampshire and Dorset.

The participants agreed a broad definition of culture which included heritage, sport & recreation, tourism and the night-time economy alongside the visual and performing arts, design and the creative industries.[1] The most important consideration was that it reflected what our region regards as relevant to local experience.

Both seminars followed a deliberative format, with participants hearing short presentations from sector experts before seeking agreed responses to some key questions about the role the sector plays in the local economy and community:

- What role does creativity and culture play in our region?

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[1] We followed the DCMS definition of creative industries, see Creative_Industries_Economic_Estimates

- What should our priorities be in supporting the sector?
- Who needs to be part of the conversation?
- Over what geography?
- What's the best way of bringing people together?

**What role does creativity and culture play in our region?**

One participant captured the breadth of the discussions, saying "[the creative & cultural sector is] *a small sector with a big impact*". Participants recognised that there were direct economic impacts, with the rapid growth of SMEs in the sector, as well as indirect economic benefits through, for example, the secondary spend of audiences. It is also developing a range of high level graduate and non-graduate skills, which can often underpin other sectors – for example design is an integral components of the advanced manufacturing or marine sectors. One of our presenters explored the interdependence of the sector with the central South's successful technology sector.

But impacts stretch beyond the economic: experiencing or participating in culture helps individual physical and mental wellbeing, and is one route to improving social inclusion and cohesion. And importantly, our cultural and creative offer is an important part of our sense of place and identity. Figure 1 below summarises how participants considered culture and creativity supports wider priorities.
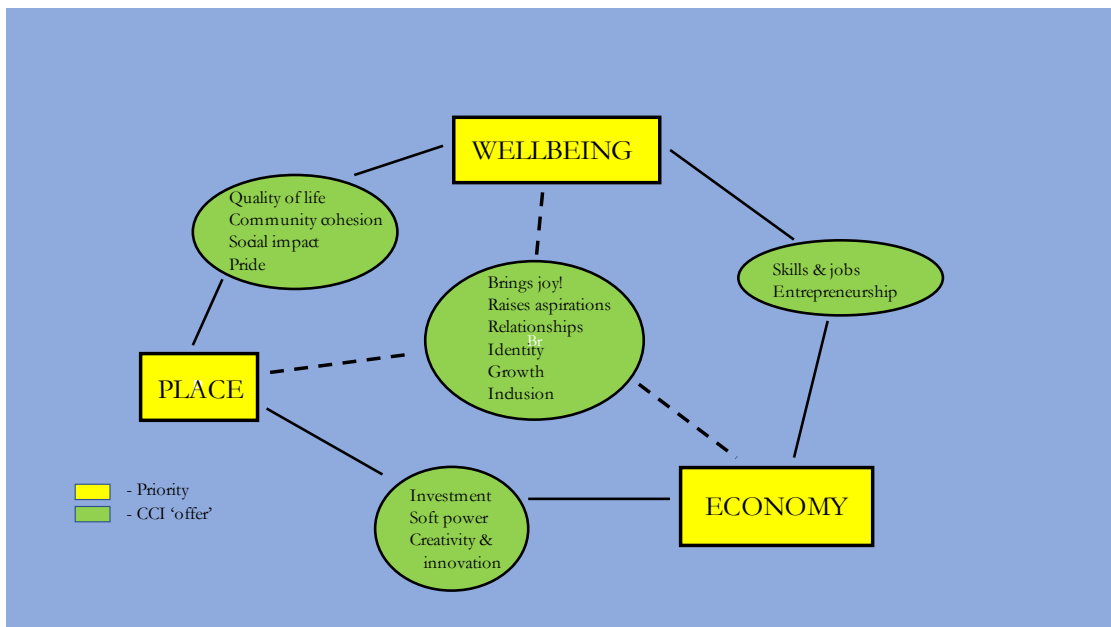


Figure 1: how the creative sector supports regional priorities

Participants voted to agree the top five ways in which culture and creativity contributes:

- Creating quirky, distinctive places
- Improving physical and mental wellbeing
- Developing skills for the modern economy
- Driving economic and social regeneration
- Making full use of the talent we have

In summary, participants concluded there is a powerful narrative outlining the sector's broad-based contribution, which must be articulated. That will help shift the discussion from one which sees culture is in some sense an option, a 'nice-to-have' which requires subsidy, to one which articulates a positive case for investment in the sector.

**What should our priorities be in supporting the sector?**

Participants agreed the top five priorities for support:

- Create a powerful narrative outlining the sector's contribution to the area's strategic priorities
- Support routes into creative careers for all under-represented groups
- Create a 'laboratory': a space or place to facilitate knowledge exchange, a data hub and a focus for sector support
- Take positive steps <u>now</u> to maintain momentum (from the seminars)
- Be inclusive, in particular engaging with young people

A broad ranging discussion identified six themes which participants felt should be pursued in supporting culture and the creative economy:

- Collate and share data, part of a wider approach to what participants called 'research & development' and linked to the notion of a 'laboratory'. Central to this task is identifying the metrics which demonstrate to others the broad impact of culture and the creative economy
- Enhance collaboration: map what we have and build networks, reach beyond the sector and include the 'unusual suspects'
- Build a narrative – a strong, evidence-based proposition the sector can offer
- Communicate to raise awareness and understanding, and to give the sector a bold voice
- Co-ordinate sector support – perhaps, again, as part of a 'laboratory'
- Focus on talent and skills: developing, nurturing and retaining what we have and helping build careers

**Who needs to be part of the conversation?**

The consensus amongst participants is that the dialogue is often too narrow. Those involved in the sector need to build a stronger rapport with other sectors to which they can make a positive contribution. They also need to have a better dialogue with 'decision-makers' – that is broadly those who are shaping regional strategies and plans. One participant spoke of how important it was that 'anchor institutions' – major shapers of the future and crucial local investors – appreciated the contribution of culture and creativity.

Practitioners felt there was already a good dialogue with local authorities and with the Higher Education sector. They needed to build stronger links with Further Education colleagues, who had a key role to play in skills development. Those missing from the discussion about the sector's role and contribution, participants felt, included LEPs and the health, wellbeing and community sectors.

There was also a widespread concern that the sector was too complacent about contacts it did have and made insufficient efforts to reach what one participant called the 'unusual suspects': those not engaged with culture such ethnic minorities, those with disabilities or young people. We need to find a form of networking and partnership which does not exclude people of widely diverse backgrounds.

The seminars discussed the rich range of existing partnerships or networks that already exist and are relevant to the sector: from Tech South (who spoke at one seminar) to the Island Collective, Portsmouth Creates or less formal design or workspace networks. Future arrangements to support the sector needed to accommodate and work with these groupings and complement their activity.

Participants felt that whatever form of partnership and dialogue was adopted in future it needed to be open and flexible to ensure it was accessible to all and not hide-bound by too rigid an approach.

**Over what geography?**

The cultural and creative sector operates within many different geographies: that defined by audiences or markets, by personal and professional connections or through shared interests. Administrative geography mattered, for example in shaping operational parameters or accessing funding, but locality (that is an area smaller than a city, district or borough) was arguably more important, not least because many organisations had a powerful sense of place and geographic identity, particularly in our cities.

For many there was a strong emphasis on their immediate community: creative practitioners wanting to work with the local community, businesses whose identity came from where they operated, entrepreneurs who were driven by a desire to "*put something into their place*". They would often reach beyond their immediate locality, but for many that was where their heart lay.

Many participants suggested a broader focus might lie along what one participant termed the 'Solent Strip', but none wanted to be constrained by a rigid geographic template given that they may have regular links with Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole to the west, eastwards to Chichester or north/south connections with Rushmoor, Basingstoke or the Isle of Wight. For many creatives, relationships with London-based organisations were also important, indeed many cultural and creative organisations or businesses look to London for working partnerships or creative collaborations.

Overall, participants in our seminars felt that collaboration should not be shaped primarily by geography but driven by task or topic: shared objectives or aspirations which cut across administrative or physical geographies, but which gave a common sense of purpose.

**What's the best way to bring people together?**

It was clear from our discussions that there is a strong desire to continue the conversation about how to support the cultural and creative sector. There was great deal of enthusiasm in the room and a desire to maintain momentum, perhaps strengthened by the long period of

Covid-enforced isolation. The two seminars have begun to shape an agenda for the ongoing conversation, but they have also given us some clear pointers as to how that conversation might be taken forward.

There were perhaps seven take-home messages about a future partnership model for the sector, which, participants suggested should:

- Have a local focus, but allied with a strong regional perspective
- Be a flexible, dynamic network bringing together practitioners and decision-makers, not a committee
- Add value to rather than duplicate or seek to usurp existing cultural and creative partnerships, networks and organisations
- Have strong links to other key groupings and partnerships which focus on priority outcomes: from economy and wellbeing to place
- Be visible and authoritative, with a strong profile and ability to influence
- Focus on 'task & finish' projects and initiatives
- Support a 'laboratory' with a focus on sharing data, experience, advice and best practice

**Shaping a future approach to support**

There is no doubt that PfSH's Quality Places Delivery Panel and CNS have done much to raise the profile of culture and creativity across the Partnership's area in the past 16 years. Their work has helped secure investment from PfSH itself, the RDA (before 2010), LEP, Arts Council and other bodies. That supported facilities and programmes, ranging from creative performance space and flexible workspace to creative apprenticeships.

However, our understanding of the contribution culture and creativity makes to the region has evolved over that time. The Delivery Panel model risks seeing culture and creativity in isolation and understates the inter-relationship between that sector and colleagues working on economic prosperity, health and wellbeing, environmental improvement, social inclusion or place-making. Participants in our seminars appreciated the broad contribution culture and creativity make, and the importance of making the sector an integral part of discussions on all topics.

That suggests our future arrangements should facilitate more sophisticated conversations, with the culture and creativity voice being an integral part of the policy-making and planning on all of our priority outcomes. They also need to ensure that the rich network of cultural and creative organisations and partnerships already working in our area can contribute to that wider policy discussion, rather than simply speaking to a narrow audience already working in the sector.

At the same time, the culture and creative economy sector needs to do a better job of making its case, explaining the wider impacts and backing that narrative up with data and relevant metrics. They need to frame their case in terms of one of investment rather than support, articulating a positive case for spend because of the wider impacts that can have.

And in part they can do that by sharing, highlighting and learning from each other's experience.

Our seminars also demonstrated that our past models were sometimes a little too rigid, whether in terms of geography, scope of what was seen to 'fit' within the sector or those it included in the conversation – for example there was no easy way for cultural practitioners to discuss shared objectives with health colleagues (indeed that cross-sector dialogue is generally hard to achieve in most partnership models). 'Flexible' and 'dynamic' were words regularly used to describe the future.

The emerging picture for future arrangements is, therefore, less of a traditional partnership or panel, with a fixed membership, regular meetings and so on. Rather, it seems needs would be better met by a co-ordinated network, bringing together a variety of people and organisations for a series of project or topic focused discussions, joining up existing bodies and reaching out to those beyond the cultural and creative sector. Importantly, its members would also have a responsibility for creating a narrative and advocacy, giving the sector a powerful voice.

There were strong arguments made that those arrangements should begin from a local perspective, building links and the wider regional picture as necessary. There are, for example, five Arts Council 'priority places' in the wider Hampshire, cities and Island area and, whilst each will have their own local aspirations, there may be value in them combining on certain topics of shared interest.

Allied with these emerging ideas was the idea of a 'laboratory' for the sector, a focus for data, best practice, support and talent development. In some respects that mirrors past 'observatories' which have co-ordinated regional data, but it also has a more pro-active role in building sector support and learning, and it was argued it could also play a vital part in developing metrics which articulate the contribution of culture and creativity is making to wider priorities. It may be that such an initiative could be overseen and answerable to a wider creative and cultural network (although a similar concept is already under discussion, see below).

**Next steps**

The emerging picture for the future outlined above has grown from listening to the views of those working in or with the creative and cultural sector. It can only be implemented and succeed if it is seen by the sector to meet their needs and is owned by creative and cultural practitioners. So we propose the next step is to discuss this report and agree a future partnership model with key voices from the sector.

This should take the form of a meeting in early autumn bringing together representatives from the sector, along with those representing HEIs, local authorities, Solent LEP, the health and wellbeing sector and community sector. There would be no more than 12-15 participants, and the aim would be to develop a model which builds on the approach developed in the two seminars reported here. That could then be shared more widely for comment before being adopted.

A further outcome from the seminars is the planning of three workshops to explore the specific support needs of parts of the culture and creative sector in the region:

- On film, a workshop bringing together a small group of interested parties, including the BFI, is planned for 23rd September
- A similar event is being planned to discuss support for the region's rich mix of music festivals
- A third event will review the appetite for developing a university hub similar to AHRC supported hubs in locations such as Oxford, Bristol, London and Manchester. This could offer a focus for knowledge and technology transfer and the development of a sector evidence base – akin to the laboratory idea mooted at our seminars

It is also worth noting that the Solent Growth Hub will be launching a sector specific creative business support service in the autumn, alongside a tech mentoring programme.